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## Welcome back...

There was turmoil and plenty of emotion at the Mexican Grand Prix. A surge of good feeling was directed towards David Philippaerts and completion of his comeback trail from a horrific double wrist break last summer. The circuit in Guadalajara allowed for some great Ray Archer photos and DP was hammering the track like no other

Photo by Ray Archer







MOTOGP

## Forging ahead...

As Matt Roberts rightly points out in our MotoGP section Casey Stoner has made two incredibly strong statements of intent by winning in Spain and Portugal. Although MotoGP has yet to hit its stride in 2012 the coming stint of races in early summer, starting with Le Mans this weekend could see the Australian strike a hefty blow in his title defence

Photo by Honda Pro images/Northcott









AMA-MX

## Goodbye 2012...

...And good riddance. At least from the perspective of the riders who struggled to see out a heavy seventeen round Supercross campaign. At Las Vegas Ryan Dungey claimed win number four in his maiden KTM term and now all thoughts turn towards the 'Outdoors' with the first AMA MX Pro National this weekend at Hangtown

Photo by Steve Cox



See Hangtown circuit  
**VIDEO**





TEST

## On-Track On-Road?

A slight new direction for OTOR and we're chuffed that a writer and bike tester of Roland Brown's calibre and experience will be contributing to the magazine. To start off we're highlighting one of the most exotic 2012 superbikes out on the roads, the Ducati Panigale. Click on the text to read Roland's thoughts

Photo by Milagro





# ONE MAN ONE REASON



Perfect start for Ryan Dungey in the AMA Supercross & 450 Motocross class on the new KTM 450 SX-F Factory Edition.

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# **GRAND PRIX OF MEXICO**

**GUADALAJARA · MAY 13th · Rnd 4 of 16**

**MX1 winner: Tony Cairoli, KTM**

**MX2 winner: Jeffrey Herlings, KTM**

# **LEFT FOR DUST**

By Adam Wheeler, all photos by Ray Archer





Watch Mexico highlights  
VIDEO





This was one of the smoother sections of what would become a difficult and gnarly layout. Some riders were daunted by the kickers and boggy ruts and it was clear caution was being exercised (even at very high speed) in the first moto.

In Mexico the Nico España circuit and other incidents provided an unfair distraction from what was yet another demonstration of how entertaining and thrilling this motorsport can be. For the people who paid to attend in Mexico and for those parked on the motorway edge and stood on the footbridge for a free appreciation of Grand Prix motocross they must have been impressed by the efforts of Tony Cairoli, Clement Desalle, David Philippaerts and Christophe Pourcel as they put on an almighty show.

Forgetting the behind the scenes turbulence the Mexican MX1 motos were an apt showcase for the merits of the premier class: four brands, four riders, four nationalities, four distinct styles and all sharing minimal track space. It was a three man show in the first moto and Pourcel could only shake his head in resignation as some torn fencing strewn across the track became wrapped in his rear wheel and stopped him 'playing' with Cairoli and Desalle with three laps to go.



French bandit. Paulin tries to fight the dust. His Kawasaki wouldn't start for Moto2

Cairolì was masterful in his hunt for lines and overtaking spots and despatched a frustrated Desalle. The Belgian was riding stronger than he had been in recent weeks and has not been closer to victory yet this season.

The second race was even better. Philippaerts (who had crashed together with Shaun Simpson on the first lap of the opening moto and had plenty of time to learn the intricacies of the surface in a charge back from last to tenth) moved up from sixth to trouble the trio

as Pourcel's hefty lead was swiftly cut down with the Frenchman balancing risk versus reward. Watching Philippaerts closely was a riveting experience. The Italian appeared to 'grow' on the bike as he made ground and positions and hit lines no-one else was doing, such as the dicey triple into the waves that allowed him to pass Ken De Dycker for fourth and really announce his presence. Cairolì made a small slip that cost him proximity to Desalle's rear wheel but Philippaerts was already banging into the Suzuki and a fiery penultimate

Absolution for Philippaerts: "I never stopped pushing. Not only in motocross but also in my life to come back to this. People thought 'can he win again?' but I knew it was possible. Today was an important moment for me and the team."



Watch Herlings/Searle crash  
**VIDEO**

lap gave him the one-second break he needed for a well-received comeback to the winner's circle. There might not be a better performance this season. De Dycker was disappointed not to have taken his maiden KTM podium with 3-5 and Cairoli made sure he passed Pourcel to record 1-3 and defeat Desalle's 2-2 by one point.

As has been the way this season MX2 couldn't hold a light to the other category. Jeffrey Herlings was barely challenged in his flight to a third double from four events

and a decent advantage in the points already. Tommy Searle is fast, fit and the only rider on a 250 that can beat the Dutchman but the extremely narrow margin between a good start and a satisfactory one is holding the Kawasaki rider back from being able to duel with the KTM championship favourite.

Searle admitted that he is racing as well as he ever has at this moment in time but the expected duel has yet to materialise on the dirt. The season-long tussle for



Herlings (nice hat) was perfect for the third time from four in 2012. He also buried the hatchet on the Searle incident from Italy: "I'm happy we didn't do any stupid things like we did in Fermo... that actually might have been my fault."

third place will be swapped between Belgians Jeremy Van Horebeek and Joel Roelants and on this occasion it was the KTM man who took a second trophy on the spin.

The quota of French talent is beginning to make a mark and from the evidence in Mexico youngsters like Christophe Charlier, Jordi Tixier, Valentin Teillet and Dylan Ferrandis could ensure the tricolour will soon have heavy presence in the junior division as well as the stand out MX1 spectacle.







The riders speak with the FIM and check out the track. Water tanks actually fell onto the course at one stage and sand storms infrequently whipped across the circuit

No Bobryshev in Mexico as the Russian was struggling to breathe. The factory Hondas stayed in the crate





Steven Frossard edges closer to a knee reconstruction as a second attempt to race after surgery to remove a broken anterior cruciate ligament proved painfully futile





Desalle was one of the many who voiced loud concerns about the track but the Belgian produced arguably his best performances of the season on Sunday



De Dycker was pipped to third position overall by Philippaerts. The Italian's path through the long waves section was key to his excellent lap-times and progress





Pourcel was in a position to win both motos and at least finish on the podium but a combination of bad luck and caution cost the Frenchman valuable championship points







## CLASSIFICATION & WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

### MX1 OVERALL RESULT

#### Riders

<b>1</b>	Tony Cairoli, ITA	KTM
<b>2</b>	Clement Desalle, BEL	Suzuki
<b>3</b>	David Philippaerts, ITA	Yamaha
<b>4</b>	Ken De Dycker, BEL	KTM
<b>5</b>	Tanel Leok, EST	Suzuki

### MX2 OVERALL RESULT

#### Riders

<b>1</b>	Jeffrey Herlings, NED	KTM
<b>2</b>	Tommy Searle, GBR	Kawasaki
<b>3</b>	Jeremy Van Horebeek, BEL	KTM
<b>4</b>	Joel Roelants, BEL	Kawasaki
<b>5</b>	Christophe Charlier, FRA	Yamaha

### MX1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS (AFTER 4 OF 16 ROUNDS)

Riders		Points
<b>1</b>	Tony Cairoli	178
<b>2</b>	Clement Desalle	149
<b>3</b>	Gautier Paulin	134
<b>4</b>	Ken De Dycker	131
<b>5</b>	Christophe Pourcel	129

### MX2 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS (AFTER 4 OF 16 ROUNDS)

Riders		Points
<b>1</b>	Jeffrey Herlings	194
<b>2</b>	Jeremy Van Horebeek	154
<b>3</b>	Tommy Searle	118
<b>4</b>	Joel Roelants	107
<b>5</b>	Jordi Tixier	105

In flight in Mexico. Jake Nicholls almost gets as high as the stunt air display



# RIDERS TO FIND A VOICE?

The riders protest action at the Grand Prix of Mexico was a consequence of a build-up of elements that ultimately resulted in an incident that might force new communication methods being established among the powers that control the sport.

Initial concerns over the volume of dust at Guadalajara soon escalated into a bigger movement with the teams also unhappy with the working conditions in the open and make-shift paddock. The climate was already heavy on the machinery and with several engine problems throughout the weekend it was a resource-draining beginning to the two-week South American stint of the Grand Prix calendar.

With team personnel and riders nonplussed on Saturday a swell of feeling led to a brief meeting with around twenty racers and FIM Race Director Dave Nicoll in which the track was declared safe for racing and the participation in the qualification heats was placed in the hands of the riders. Thus began a frantic period of talk, suggestion, claim and counter-claim. While the organisers at the Nico España responded to the direct criticism of their facility admirably for race day, the repercussions of the paddock's stand (only Rockstar Suzuki placed their bikes in the waiting zone for the

MX1 heat) will be seen in the coming weeks. The teams were previously represented by an association that worked in tandem with Youthstream to find the best route through the mess of the economic rupture in 2008.

There is no official riders body, and while many looked towards world champion Tony Cairoli (who stated the riders position to the press) there was a lack of organisation in terms of what they wanted and what they were prepared to do.

It was as though there wasn't a precedent in going beyond stating their case as group complaint.

The strongest asset the riders had was their unity and not one of the 20 MX1 GP regulars went out for the Heat as the picket line was strong. Some of the more cautious teams and mechanics had little choice, as nobody wanted to deter from the wishes of their athletes.

On Sunday a letter was signed by the majority with the aim of presenting the document to the FIM and Youthstream outlining the reasons and explanation for Saturday's course of events.

Depending on the next steps taken to prevent an occurrence of what happened in Mexico, the formation of a riders' committee is closer than it has been for quite some time.





# FRESH INJURY PROBLEMS AFTER MEXICO

There cannot be many black cats around the Honda World motocross team workshop in Italy. Both Evgeny Bobryshev and Rui Goncalves are going through their own injury nightmares at the moment and it has left the Italian squad, with the special works CRF450R, without track time and sizeable presence after the first quarter of the season. It needed something fairly serious for the tough Bobryshev not to attempt the Mexican Grand Prix and a bout of Bronchitis, coupled with the altitude and temperatures in Guadalajara meant the Russian was sidelined (even though he attempted a few laps in practice to his credit). Goncalves has a damaged tendon around a pocket of hip muscles and also yanked his right thumb through trying to deal with the Nico España bumps.

Monster Energy Yamaha took another battering in what is already a freakishly scarred campaign for the works crew.

Michael Leib and Shaun Simpson stared at dislocated fingers and shoulders while Steven Frossard was in tears through pain and another jolt to his ligament-less right knee.

The combined total of 39 riders in both classes in Mexico could be reduced further for Brazil.

Over at Red Bull KTM Max Nagl is pushing to confirm some sort of date for a return to racing after several back operations and perhaps the German already knows that team-mate/replacement Ken De Dycker (one of the most consistent performers in the MX1 series this year) will get this hands on the new 450SX-F in the coming weeks. The model that Ryan Dungey steered to three Supercross main event victories will be given to the Belgian to race for the first time in his national series after the Brazilian Grand Prix and before the trip to France.

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# A TWO PESOS WORTH...

By Adam Wheeler

**E**veryone voiced opinions in Mexico. As I try to write my thoughts on the weekend now it is hard not to be confused by what we saw, heard and felt. My first emotion is that the Grand Prix organisers have to be cut some slack in the same way that any kind of 'rookie' can make mistakes but for all their hard work and effort they can be accused of naivety. Simply visiting one grand prix in Europe (or last year's excellent Brazilian round) would have permitted more insight as to the standards for track and infrastructure that a FIM World Championship event now demands. Co-promoter and former double MX World Champion Seb Tortelli admitted in a press conference on Saturday afternoon that the GP had been affected by local and national elections taking place in July and with the budget hampered by the political upheaval the original goal to have the circuit in another setting had to be altered and the fine, powdery soil of the Nico España was the only option. Casting an eye over the facility on Saturday it looked impressive. The layout was challenging and the situation next to the highway, opposite a shopping centre and 15 mins from the city centre was the kind of setting other Grands Prix can only dream about.

Hearing the full thoughts of the paddock, the track designers, Youthstream and also Tortelli it was a case of a well-backed event simply being on the side of the wrong hill and with the wrong terrain. As the sparse qualification heats got underway (11 riders in MX2 and 10 in MX1) I found myself trackside in bizarre circumstances of standing among a group of individuals that I'd normally be watching in action. As we left the circuit that evening we had to wait while a simply enormous tanker of water drove up the access road into the circuit.

The track was partially saved for Sunday (in fact the dust was minimal) but the bumpy jump

take-offs and some immensely rough sections had some – but not all – publicly talking about the danger factor. I was more upset with the standard of the Mexican and locally entered riders. For sure a Grand Prix should be a platform to show some talent and learn but the level of the racers was low and hazardous.

**Perhaps now is the time to consider a pre-qualifying lap-time cut-off...**

Umpteen crashes and the blindness to the blue flag was staggering. I can never remember seeing the speed and ability so disparate between those who could and those who couldn't. It was like two meetings in one. Perhaps it is time to introduce a lap-time cut-off ratio after pre-qualification. It would reduce the gate but increase the quality and safety.

It will be interesting to see how things develop for the Mexican Grand Prix. Tortelli hinted towards a lower turnout than expected by unfairly highlighting that the rider's actions on Saturday contributed to an 'event cancelled' headline in a national newspaper (dubious reporting or what?!). He also spoke of the five year agreement to run the event. I think it's fair to say people were wary of the Mexican trip and there were some (already well reported) sights that reminded many of the sheer distance from home.

The event was a curious episode in the tale of the 2012 series and thankfully we can take memories of MX1 and David Philippaerts' excellent resurrection as some of the sugar with the salt.

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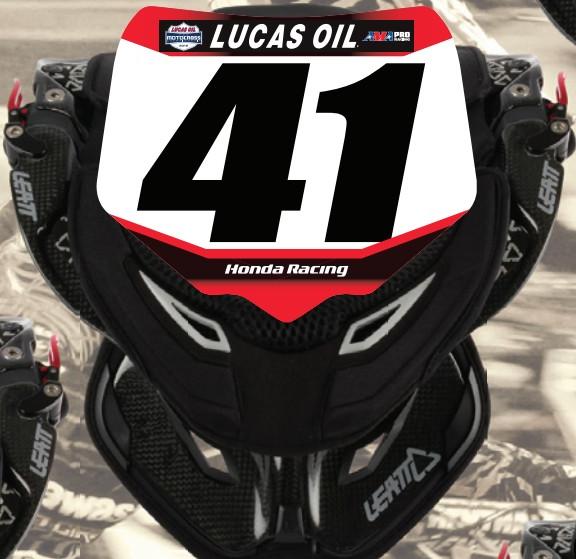
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# TRACK STAR

By Roland Brown, photos by Milagro

No wonder car giant Audi was so keen to complete its purchase of Ducati.

Recently the Italian firm has been gaining sales in a falling market with some innovative and brilliantly engineered bikes. Two years ago the Multi-strada 1200 put an aggressive new spin on the adventure bike class.

Last year's awesome Diavel redefined the term power cruiser. And now the 1199 Panigale has arrived to bring a new dimension to Ducati's familiar super-sports hunting ground.





Official Paginale site  
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# D

FEATURE





At a glance the Panigale — named after Ducati's local district of Bologna — could just be another evolution of the marque's famous V-twin format, albeit an especially sleek one. The bodywork's 'shark-like' shape echoes the outgoing 1198 model's design, finished in the trademark bright red. In parts it is cut away to reveal an 1198cc engine that keeps the 90-degree cylinder angle and desmodromic (valves closed by cams) layout of old.

But the familiarity is misleading because this is a dramatically new machine whose engine and chassis dispense with decades of tradition. The so-called Superquadro (Oversquare) powerplant has radically short-stroke dimensions and operates its camshafts by chains instead of belts. The extra revs and bigger valves permitted by this layout result in a maximum output of 195bhp — a massive 25bhp increase over the previous engine, and right up with the most powerful fours.

The chassis is even more revolutionary. In place of the tubular steel trellis that has kept Ducati V-twin motors in place for four decades is a monocoque aluminium structure that doubles as the airbox and uses the motor as a stressed member. The rear shock sits horizontally on the left. Numerous weight-saving features, including a magnesium headlamp support and an aluminium rear subframe that bolts directly to the engine, combine to reduce total wet weight to just 188kg — a huge 10kg saving.



D

FEATURE

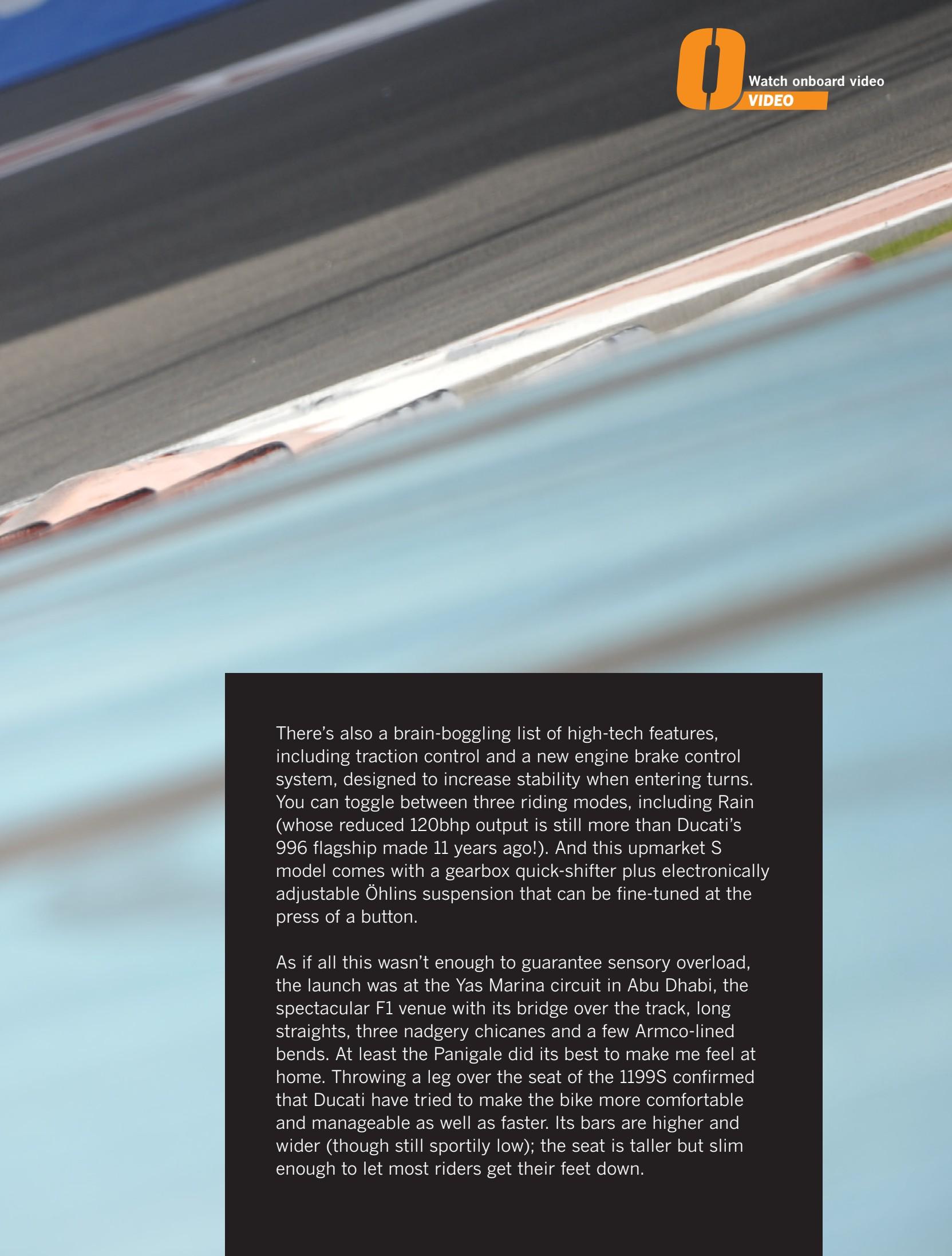
DUCATI PANIGALE TEST





Watch onboard video

**VIDEO**



There's also a brain-boggling list of high-tech features, including traction control and a new engine brake control system, designed to increase stability when entering turns. You can toggle between three riding modes, including Rain (whose reduced 120bhp output is still more than Ducati's 996 flagship made 11 years ago!). And this upmarket S model comes with a gearbox quick-shifter plus electronically adjustable Öhlins suspension that can be fine-tuned at the press of a button.

As if all this wasn't enough to guarantee sensory overload, the launch was at the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi, the spectacular F1 venue with its bridge over the track, long straights, three nifty chicanes and a few Armco-lined bends. At least the Panigale did its best to make me feel at home. Throwing a leg over the seat of the 1199S confirmed that Ducati have tried to make the bike more comfortable and manageable as well as faster. Its bars are higher and wider (though still sportily low); the seat is taller but slim enough to let most riders get their feet down.



On track it was clear that this was a Ducati like no other, despite its throaty V-twin bark through the new centrally placed silencers. For one thing it's notably faster than before: stunningly, breathtakingly rapid. It charged through the gears while I tapped at the quickshifter, the shift light flashing at 11,000rpm as the Panigale sucked up the long straights towards its max of over 185mph. But unlike previous Ducatis it really had to be revved hard. Below 8000rpm the Superquadro motor has notably less of the midrange shove that has previously been part of a big Ducati's appeal.

Handling was startlingly light with an agility through the tight chicanes that made the 1199S supremely easy to ride, flicking from side to side in an instant in response to a caress of the bars. There was a bit of head-shake under maximum acceleration on one straight, and I didn't have enough track time to get the multi-adjustable suspension dialled in perfectly, but the potential for superb handling was there (even though Rossi abandoned the monocoque chassis his Desmosedici MotoGP racer used last season).

And braking power was immense thanks to a new, lighter Brembo system which on this S model comes with very impressive ABS. It's undoubtedly a fearsomely fast and capable track tool, this Panigale, and an inspired piece of engineering that takes superbike technology to a new level. Its performance has not been delivered without compromise: I can't help feeling that for road riding, especially, it's a shame to lose that chunk of the old 1198's midrange, whatever Ducati say about the 1199 being easier to ride as well as faster.

Inevitably the Panigale is expensive, costing £15,750 in its most basic form or £19,750 for this S model. (There's also a flagship Tricolore model with titanium race silencer and sophisticated data acquisition system, at £23,495.) But Ducati's decision to abandon tradition for a brave new world has resulted in a stunning bike that looks set to continue the firm's run of success under its new ownership.



FEATURE





## THE GEAR

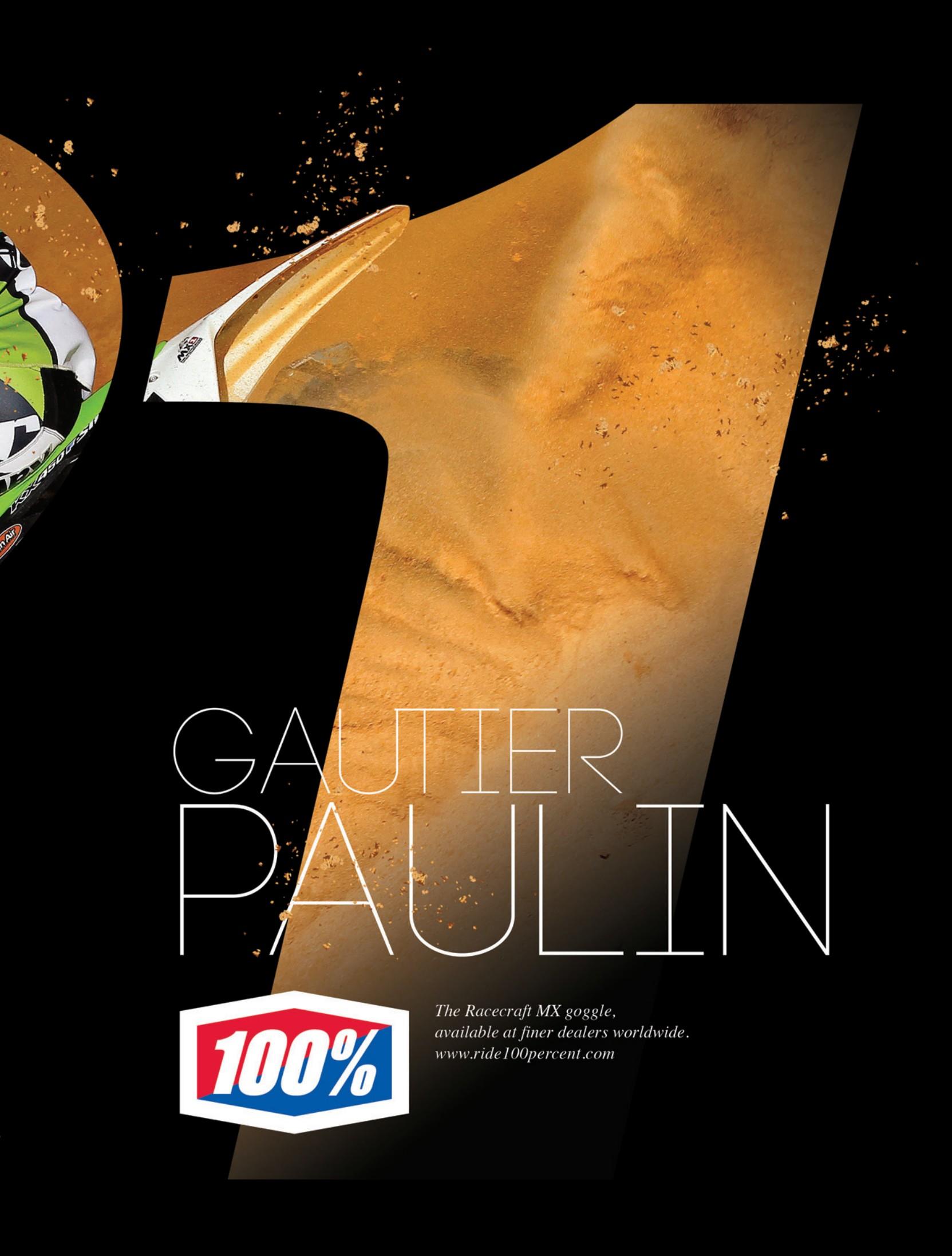
Two words cover the gear I've been wearing on track tests of late: Arai and Dainese.

There's good stuff from other brands but I've not tried better. This kit's not cheap: the Arai Quantum costs over £400; a typical Dainese suit close to £1000; gloves and boots £200 a pair. But top modern gear is comfortable, stylish and amazingly protective.

A couple of years ago I crashed a KTM on track at 100mph, wrecking the bike plus my helmet, leathers, gloves and boots. I had a small graze on one finger, and was glad I hadn't settled for less. Happily the only damage in Abu Dhabi was to the bar bill.



Photo: Ray Archer



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# MOTO

# MOTOGP

# GRANDE PREMIO de PORTUGAL

ESTORIL · MAY 6th · Rnd 3 of 18

MotoGP winner: Casey Stoner, Honda

Moto2 winner: Marc Marquez, Suter

Moto3 winner: Sandro Cortese, KTM

# PERFECTION

Photos by Honda Pro Images/Northcott,  
Milagro, Ducati Corse Press, KTM Images  
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# GAL CIRCUITO ESTORIL





on cur  
Estoril



Stoner complained of chatter through a varied weekend of weather at Estoril but was faultless on Sunday



Ninth place for Bradl in Portugal. The German had won the Moto2 race for the previous two years at the venue



The Tech3 Yamaha riders kept their own company again and so far are outshining the factory Yamaha squad





Valentino had notched ten podiums at Estoril in his career. He still is searching for a second trophy with the Ducati since the start of 2011...



Watch Rossi Le Mans Promo  
**VIDEO**



Moto2 was again quite superb entertainment. Espargaro likened the last lap charge to the old 125cc days



A landmark first victory  
for KTM in Moto3 thanks  
to Sandro Cortese







# STONER'S FULL HOUSE

Three races into the 2012 MotoGP World Championship and Casey Stoner probably holds the most commanding one-point lead in the history of the championship. His narrow advantage has come about in the most convincing fashion, with back-to-back victories at the only two circuits where he had never previously won in the premier class before this season.

Statistics, of course, can often be irrelevant but in this case the numbers cannot fail to have caught the attention of Jorge Lorenzo, who had won for the previous two seasons at Jerez whilst his record at Estoril was even more impressive: three wins and four pole positions from the previous four years.

Now the Spaniard must attempt turn the tide at a run of circuits where Stoner was unbeatable in 2011 – Le Mans, Catalunya and Silverstone (although Lorenzo took the wins at these three circuits in 2010).

Incidentally Stoner's win in Portugal was his 42nd in total across all classes, moving him level with Max Biaggi and Toni Mang on the all-time Grand Prix winners list. The only riders with more wins than Stoner are Giacomo Agostini (122), Valentino Rossi (105), Angel Nieto (90), Mike Hailwood (76), Mick Doohan (54), Phil Read (52) and Jim Redman (45). It was also his eighteenth consecutive podium - one better than Doohan's best run, five shy of Agostini's and just six short of Rossi's record.





Honda Pro Images

# RAINMAN RETURNS

**O**ne of the nicest guys in racing returns to the MotoGP paddock this weekend in place of, well, one of the nicest guys in racing as Chris Vermeulen takes over from the injured Colin Edwards for the French Grand Prix. Still only 29 years old, the affable Australian's career is a story of gloriously unfulfilled potential and it is remarkable that he finds himself unemployed just five years after celebrating MotoGP success at the very same circuit where he makes his return this Friday.

That win in the rain at Le Mans in 2007 from twelfth on the grid means that Vermeulen will always hold a place in history as one of only seven riders to celebrate victory during the 800cc era, along with Casey Stoner, Dani Pedrosa, Jorge Lorenzo, Valentino Rossi, Loris Capirossi and Ben Spies.

It was a result that confirmed his reputation as a wet weather specialist, which was backed

up by another podium at Donington and a pole position at Assen in similar conditions, and gave him the confidence to challenge at the front in the dry. A front row start and second place finish behind Casey Stoner at the USGP, when he led the race until mid-distance, suggested that Vermeulen was capable of breaking into the 'alien' category and on the uncompetitive Suzuki he managed back-to-back podiums at Sachsenring and Laguna Seca in 2008.

However, a severe dip in form and confidence since then – along with some nasty injuries – has seen Vermeulen unable to fulfil the potential once hailed by his mentor Barry Sheene, which saw him crowned World Supersport Champion as a 21-year old back in 2003.

He faces a huge challenge on the Forward Racing CRT machine this weekend but hopefully the French Grand Prix can once again be the start of good times for Chris.

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# MAKE BELIEVE...

By Matthew Roberts

**I**t's a sad fact that on the rare occasion MotoGP seems to get the coverage it deserves in our national print media, the sport's biggest name is being used for a cheap headline. Sensationalist storytelling once again brought our sport to national prominence this week with a piece published in The Daily Telegraph by an F1 journalist that, to my knowledge, has no direct connections with Valentino Rossi or Jeremy Burgess, claiming that the nine-time World Champion and his revered Australian crew chief are to retire at the end of this season.

The whispers spread like wildfire across the plains of the Twitterverse until Rossi himself had to step in and administer the cold water treatment first-hand. "I have no intention of retiring at the end of the season, it is a made up story," he tweeted in Italian, before retweeting with typical good humour some even more outrageous made-up rumours from his faithful followers including one that he was to set up an agricultural tourism joint-venture with Casey Stoner.

Coincidentally this story came just a week after Spanish weekly motorcycling magazine 'Solo Moto' ran a front-cover exclusive also suggesting Stoner would be retiring at the end of this season, a claim flatly denied by the Australian at Estoril. "Don't believe everything you read... In fact, in your case don't believe everything you produce," he quipped, aiming his riposte directly at the journalist who had written the piece.

Stoner has made no secret of the fact that he intends his racing career to be relatively short, as he looks to make up for the lost time of a childhood spent travelling the dirt tracks of Australia and short circuits of the UK and Spain in pursuit of his Grand Prix dream. However, there is still too much to be achieved by a man who thrives on proving people wrong and the adrenaline of victory can prove too strong a drug to resist - just ask Rossi.

"I'll be finished by the time I'm 30 and that's too long a retirement, so it will be necessary to have something else to do," '46' declared back in November 2001, just after winning his maiden premier-class title at the age of 22. Despite dabbling in some F1 testing with Ferrari (prompting rumours of a full-time switch), a handful of impressive displays in the World Rally Championship and most recently the Blancpain Endurance Race, Rossi has always returned for his primary two-wheeled fix.

Aside from the quiet life back on his farm, Stoner's other passion lies in Australian V8 Supercar racing and in December 2011 he completed a 90-lap test in Queensland with a view to a potential future on four

wheels. But even if the current series leader were to take the decision to retire from MotoGP right now, what would he have to gain by telling anybody of his plans?

For Stoner there is too much still to play for in 2012, too much development of the new 1000cc machines yet to take place between now and the prize-giving ceremony at Valencia in November to risk upsetting the apple cart at HRC and, with a newborn daughter to take care of, far more pressing issues to worry about at the moment than retirement.

## Rumours spread like wildfire until Rossi himself had to step in...

Rossi, meanwhile, has the most respected reputation in motorcycle racing history to try and rescue. For whilst his legacy cannot be tarnished, his record has been undoubtedly smudged by a nightmarish 18 months since forming one half of an Italian dream team with Ducati.

Sure, he may make internal threats to the Italian factory in an attempt to make them bend to his 33-year-old ways but an exit through the back door of a sport he is principally responsible for turning into the global spectacle it is today is surely not an option. Besides, there are enough questions about the format of the series in 2013 and beyond to suggest that the so-called 'GOAT' can at least be a race winner again.

As for Burgess, a seven-time title winner himself with Freddie Spencer, Wayne Gardner and Mick Doohan before Rossi came along: "JB has Castrol R for blood, he ain't going anywhere soon," tweeted Alex Briggs (@Alex\_Briggs), long-term right hand man to Burgess at Honda, Yamaha and now Ducati.

Of course, stranger things have happened in sport and maybe retirement is around the corner for Stoner and Rossi after all. However, that moment will eventually come on their own terms and until then we can expect nothing from either but denial.

In the meantime, unfortunately, with all of the top riders in the championship out of contract at the end of this season there is nothing that will stop the speculation and the stories.



**FEATURE**

2012 WR450F TEST



# BAR SETTING...

OTOR SAMPLED A MARCH OF PROGRESSION WHEN  
YAMAHA SPAIN KINDLY PROVIDED 2011 AND 2012  
VERSIONS OF THEIR WR450F OFF-ROADER...

By Adam Wheeler, photos by JP Acevedo [www.mx1onboard.com](http://www.mx1onboard.com)



After enlisting the burgeoning race-track skill set of BBC (and OTOR's) MotoGP presenter Matt Roberts and the patience of www.mx1onboard.com's Juan Pablo Acevedo, the trails around the idyllic seaside setting of Sitges, some 25km south of Barcelona, was the site to put the Yamahas through their paces. When some of the off-road rustiness was blown-away (sadly I spend far too much time writing about and watching dirt-bikes

rather than throttling them) it was fairly easy to deduce where Yamaha had set their aims for the reworked WR. The 2012 incarnation is more than a makeover. It is a different animal and a 21st century off-road motorcycle in several senses.

Here is the skivvy on why this bike demands attention and why your appetite should be considerably damp to give it a run...





## 1 ENGINE AND TRACTABILITY

In 2007 I was lucky enough to be invited to Yamaha's principal factory in Iwata, Japan. While the tour around the facility was predictably guarded, watching the assembly lines of a YZ450F being kitted together like a LEGO model was absolutely fascinating.

Later that evening at dinner a group of journalists were separated among the Japanese technical crew responsible for the motocross production programme. I watched GP winner and MX1 World Championship leader at that time Josh Coppins struggling with the food and the lack of English of his immediate table neighbours. I was lucky enough to be sitting next to YZ Project Leader Taisuke 'Tod' Sakurai and spent a couple of hours talking about his time in the USA and his vision for Yamaha's future application for off-road bikes.

The key issue for him (that he would let on) was 'tractability'. Among other things Tod wanted better and quicker response from the throttle. Instant and controllable power on tap.

2007 was also the last year in which the WR450F enduro machine had a major upgrade. Since then the bike has appeared with cosmetic and token refinements. Until now. Sakurai's vision is coming ever closer.

Back in Sitges the time I spent kick-starting the 2011 WR into life was almost as frustrating for Matt - waiting patiently having fired up the 2012 fuel injected engine - as it was tiring for me. It is a simple and perhaps a moot point but the capability to ignite the new WR at a moment's notice was one of the first and stark differences of the fresh FI-equipped motor. Other subtle attributes help provide a realisation that the '12 bike was a leap forwards but the extra zip and buzz from the very bottom of the power curve made it clear right from the first feathering of the rubber grip that this was another prospect. No lag or wallow in some of the slower and more technical terrain we covered. The '12 wanted to be pushed.

Fuel injection has been the most exciting dimension that the Japanese have been able to bring to the off-road market in the last half a decade and the customisable options and the effects of the titanium five valve unit feeding off the system have given the technicians more ground to explore the power capabilities of their motorcycles. The '11 WR is no slouch but the newer sibling asks for a bit more punishment, and combined with the new chassis, is in a position to take as little or as much abuse.

# O

FEATURE

2012 WR450F TEST



**"For me the 2012 WR450F inspired more confidence. It promised more in its delivery and behaviour and dared you to go faster."**



Watch WR450F video  
**VIDEO**

## 2 FEEL

The position and set of the 2012 WR450F fosters a more sporty appreciation. The ergonomics are tangible. The bike seems like a 250 between your legs (I have a 2008 WR250F and the 450 felt more compact) pushing you further forward and allowing the sensation that it will take minimum effort to place the Yamaha in any direction you choose.

Again, as with the engine, the effect is an improved and sharper edition of what has gone before. The milder offering both in power and poise of the '11 will be the preference of some, and the formula has worked for the better part of five years – indeed Matt found the 'diluted' WR less tempting and easier to handle – but the bilateral beam frame of the '12 is largely responsible for the agility, and the roots from the YZ250F motocross model is another example of how things have progressed.

The '11 is powerful and fast enough to engage any enduro rider's whims but the new sibling takes this feeling up a notch.

It feels sportier, more demanding. The '12 wants to play, to be aggressive. In a basic sense swapping between the two bikes was like riding an enduro bike (the '11) and then climbing on a motocrosser (the '12). For me the '12 inspired more confidence. It promised more in its delivery and behaviour and dared you to go faster; it definitely caused a few more heart-in-the-mouth moments.

Both bikes weigh the same but you'd never guess. The '12's cylinder has a more vertical position to help towards centralisation; just like a 'Crosser.

The '12 veers towards fun and will be the preferred pick for those that like to compete but we weren't able to hit any majorly rough stuff to give a thorough evaluation on the suspension. However the KYB shock and Yamaha stock fork were capable enough.



# 3 LOOK AND AMBITION

Sharper and shorter plastics and cool black wheel rims were two of the most obvious aesthetic highlights of the '12 WR. The look fitted the new philosophy admirably. Even the headlight gave the bike a mean 'pinta', as the Spanish would say. The 'look' of the '12 was the final part of the process in edging the WR even closer to the advanced motocross section of the family and the YZs.

When it comes to riding off-road KTM have around a 40% market share and a wealth of options to cater for every age group, degree of ability or size preference. The Austrians are a mighty foe and while the Japanese might have bought and disassembled machines by their native rivals in the past to keep an eye on what the competition is producing, it is hard to imagine that technicians in the far east have been ignoring orange motorcycles over the past seven or eight years. The standard of Japanese dirt bike – the smallest sector of two wheeled sales for the companies but with multipurpose engine technology affecting every-

thing from quads to lawnmowers – have pulled up significantly in recent years. Suzuki were the first to bolt fuel injection to their RM-Z450 in 2005 while Yamaha completely redesigned their YZ450F in 2009 and Kawasaki and now Honda have followed suit with engine placement, exhaust manipulation and chassis reset just some of the major revisions and ideas coming forth.

After making a splash in motocross Yamaha needed to update their wares in a more general off-road sense and that goal has been admirably achieved with the WR450F. It is tricky to think where the next step can be. The bike is fast enough, reliable enough, practical and will fluctuate the adrenaline of pretty much any rider. One Yamaha employee from the same Iwata visit in 2007 told me that the company take their time to roll out new ideas or research into production but when they do its with the knowledge that the technology is right on the money. The WR is indeed proof of this approach.





### THE ROAD RIDER'S VIEW: MATTHEW ROBERTS

After a brace of Superbike schools and track days it took some time to find my feet off-road. It is pretty bewildering just how much you need to adjust at the beginning to find the confidence and the comfort to be able to push yourself and feel safe and quick on the bike. After a settling in period through the test I have to say that my relative inexperience on the dirt left me favouring the 2011 WR450F.

I found the bike a bit bigger, a bit heavier and easier on the throttle to be able to wind through the paths and hit the bumps with security. I rode the first part of the day on the new 2012 version and after switching to the old carburetted Yamaha it was like switching from a zippy sportscar to a more sedate family car.

Perhaps with more time I would have appreciated the increased performance potential of the '12 WR but for a beginner the old Yamaha

offered all I needed from a 450 to enjoy an off-road ride.

The new WR looks the business and the fuel injection definitely helps with the starts and you visually see where Yamaha have progressed. It is pretty cool that a polished product like that can cater for the demands off-roaders want from their machinery.





# GINGER FOR GINGER

With the defending AMA National Motocross Champion Ryan Villopoto out of the 2012 outdoor season while he recovers from the knee injury he suffered at his hometown supercross in Seattle, Washington, fans and media alike began asking the question immediately: Who is going to be the replacement rider for Villopoto? To be clear, there is no replacement for Ryan Villopoto, however the Monster Energy Kawasaki team has named someone to ride his bike outdoors: Tyla Rattray. Rattray flat-out flies on a 450 outdoors and he showed that at the 2011 Motocross of Nations.

The South African is hoping to have a 450cc ride for 2013 and beyond. Early on, there were rumors that perhaps he would ride Pro Circuit's 450 outdoors while Broc Tickle moved back to the 250 class but Tickle is staying on a 450. And with Rattray moving to the 450 for the factory squad that left an opening on a Pro Circuit KX250F.

Who could fill it? How about former AMA 250 National Champ Ivan Tedesco? Done and done. It'll be an interesting summer.





## BARCIA STAYS RED

Widely touted as the 'next big thing', if not for a part-time ride on a 450 during the AMA Nationals in 2011 people may have had a hard time believing Justin Barcia would be good on a 450. On a 250, he's banging off the rev-limiter and just generally abusing the poor bike the entire time he's on it, but outdoors last year, on the factory Honda CRF450R, Barcia was a lot smoother than many people expected him to be. Why? Well, he had to be... Showing that he could make the transition

with a fill-in ride really helped his stock with the Honda factory much like it did for former GEICO Honda team-mate Trey Canard a couple years ago, and Honda is definitely hanging on to 'BamBam' for 2013 and beyond. He will likely join Canard next year who should be truly healthy by then. What does this mean for Justin Brayton? Probably a third factory Honda 450, if I had to guess. He likely won't be going anywhere, either.

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# CHANGING OF THE GUARD...?

By Steve Cox

With literally no titles to decide in Las Vegas it seems most of the industry was there for the party – even more than usual. But there was at least one noteworthy story in Nevada, which involved the emergence of the GEICO Honda team as perhaps not just a contender but maybe the dominant team in the Lites/250 class.

The GEICO Honda crew - run by Factory Connection Racing - has been around for nearly 15 years now and it hasn't been easy to take on the most successful Lites/250/125 team in the history of the sport; Pro Circuit. Still, the GEICO squad has had success, winning a 125cc West title with Travis Preston in 2002, winning quite a few races in the big-bike class with Mike LaRocco (now the team co-manager, along with Darren Borchering) and Kevin Windham, etc. And more recently, they claimed the 2008 Lites East SX championship with Trey Canard, the 2010 250 Outdoor title with Canard, and the 2011 Lites East crown with Justin Barcia. They almost won the Lites West in 2011 with Eli Tomac as well. But when the series headed outdoors in 2011, Pro Circuit went back to its winning ways and absolutely dominated, winning 23 out of the 24 motos and sweeping the top three spots in the championship.

Well, outdoors has yet to start but we can say this for sure, as of 2012, the dominant SX Lites team is GEICO Honda. This year they pulled down both the Lites East with Barcia and the Lites West with Tomac and did so in pretty dominant fashion. It's the first time the GEICO team has swept both coasts – a feat that is almost expected from the Pro Circuit squad (the first time Pro Circuit owned both coasts was in its first year, 1991, with Jeremy McGrath [West] and Brian Swink [East]).

Maybe more importantly, though, the success from 2008 until now is a direct result of a 10-year plan put in place by team co-owner and founder Rick "Ziggy" Zielfelder, whose idea it was to start finding top amateur prospects and signing them to the professional factory team a year or two before they make their pro debuts.

**It hasn't been easy to take on the most successful Lites/250/125 team ever**

Trey Canard was the first racer in this line and he paid off right away in 2008 and landed the team its first National championship in 2010. Then came Justin Barcia, Eli Tomac, and Justin Bogle, and there will be more.

To conclude the 2012 titles in Las Vegas, the GEICO Honda team won both the Lites East and Lites West main events, handily, then went out and went 1-2 with the same two riders – Barcia and Tomac – in the East/West Shootout. No, it wasn't the 1-2-3-4 showing like Pro Circuit had in 2010 with Jake Weimer, Josh Hansen, Chris Pourcel and Dean Wilson, but it was still mighty impressive.

The next test, especially after last year, will be outdoors. Can the GEICO Honda team keep it up starting this weekend at Hangtown? Or will the Monster Energy/Pro Circuit Kawasaki team rebound like they did in 2011? Stay tuned...





## BACKPAGE

2012 Monster Energy girls

By Ray Archer







# ON TRACK OFF ROAD

**'On-track Off-road'** is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at [www.ontrackoffroad.com](http://www.ontrackoffroad.com) every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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